

Don't Let Medicare Beneficiaries Lose \$1200 This Holiday Season!

The deadline to enroll in the Transitional Assistance credit for 2004 is rapidly approaching! In this week's *Covering America*, we are emphasizing the importance of enrolling beneficiaries who are eligible to receive a total of \$1,200 in 2004 and 2005 Transitional Assistance but only IF they enroll by **DECEMBER 31**.

You play an important role in helping beneficiaries choose a drug card and complete the enrollment process. Completed enrollment forms must be received by card sponsors before December 31. Beneficiaries who qualify and enroll by that time can carry over the full \$600 benefit into 2005 in addition to receiving and receive the full \$600 credit in 2005.

As you conduct your activities this month, please make enrollment your No. 1 priority. Helping low-income beneficiaries take advantage of both the discount card and the \$600 credit is a wonderful way to give this holiday season. Take extra time to sit down with beneficiaries to explain the benefits of the Transitional Assistance and walk them through the drug card selection process. If a beneficiary isn't able to complete the form that day, follow up with them to make sure they have dropped the form in the mail well before the deadline. You may even want to provide them with an envelope and stamp to use.

This issue of the *Covering America* provides you with enrollment tips from fellow community-based organizations and spotlights the enrollment efforts of the Chicago Department of Public Health. We hope this information helps you help Medicare beneficiaries save money this holiday season and in the year ahead. Have a safe and happy holiday season!

Organization of the Week

*Chicago Department of Public Health
Office of Health Care Access (OHCA)
Chicago, Ill*

“We develop rapport and gain the trust of the beneficiaries we assist,” said Kenzy Vanderbroek, Director of the Office of Health Care Access (OHCA), a division of the Chicago Department of Public Health. This type of one-on-one interaction is part of what distinguishes OHCA and has certainly helped advance their assistance and enrollment numbers. OHCA’s CAREline enrollment center staff has been successful in enrolling each eligible Medicare beneficiary they have assisted. According to Kenzy, they attribute their success to the attention they pay to consumers and their interests. “Many beneficiaries are resistant, at first, to applying. We take time to listen to their needs as we determine the specific benefits they will receive from the drug card that’s best for them. Their stories are their lives, and we give our full attention as they tell them to us.”

OHCA removes barriers to enrollment by making the process easy for the beneficiary. They explain all the options and make sure to keep a running commentary on their actions, as they use the PDAP tool on www.medicare.gov to determine the most appropriate benefits for each senior. Additionally, if the beneficiary is eligible for transitional assistance, they check to be sure that cards under consideration have agreements with pharmaceutical manufacturers to provide free or reduced drugs once the \$600 credit is exhausted. To move this process one step closer to finality, OHCA mails a packet to the beneficiary that same day, containing detailed information regarding their selected card, the list of their prescription drugs, chosen pharmacy and estimated savings. CAREline counselors use the information provided by the beneficiary to complete most of the application form, highlight the remaining questions and signature section so that beneficiaries know what they need to complete before submitting the application. Finally, a stamped enveloped addressed to the drug card of their choice is included in the package.

These simple, yet very important steps have been instrumental in OHCA’s success. To date, more than 9,630 beneficiaries are now covered due to CAREline and OHCA-trained outstation staff enrollment activities.

To learn more about the Chicago Department of Public Health, e-mail Kenzy Vanderbroek at vanderbroek_kenzy@cdph.org.

A spotlight on CAREline

The CAREline is a consumer helpline that serves as the enrollment center for OHCA’s Medicare Drug Discount Card outreach, education, and enrollment activities.

CAREline counselors are trained professionals who provide confidential, individualized counseling to consumers on their Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Card options and assist them in navigating the enrollment process.

The CAREline, 1-312-745-CARE [2273], is staffed weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Consumers can contact the CAREline through OHCA's Web site at www.cityofchicago.org/Health/OHCA or by e-mail at CAREline@cdph.org 24/7. Counselors return after-hours voice-mail and e-mail messages during the next business day.

What They're Saying...Enrollment Success Quotes

"We had a Thanksgiving inter-generational event, and grown children were able to help their elderly parents understand more about the drug card process."

*Uri Mayfield, Rav Tov Committee to Aid New Immigrants
Los Angeles, CA*

"We are making home visits to frail and homebound beneficiaries who cannot come to us. This has been most helpful to beneficiaries who would otherwise not be able to get the individual assistance that they need to enroll in a Medicare Drug Discount Card."

*Marie Allen, Norwalk Senior Center
Norwalk, CT*

"The most important aspect of our outreach efforts has been to sit one-on-one with the client, do intake, run the query on the database, print the applications, complete them with the client's help and have the client sign them, all in one sitting. WE mail the applications. We have found no other method that works better!"

*Vicki Shanahan, Atlanta Regional Commission
Atlanta, GA*

"Beneficiaries find it most helpful if after I conduct a computer analysis in PDAP, I write a personal letter to the beneficiary explaining the results in simple language, then follow up with a phone call."

*Francine Chuchanis, The Area Agency on Aging, 10B, Inc.
Uniontown, OH*

Enrollment Tips from the Field

As you assist beneficiaries to consider the Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Card and Transitional Assistance, keep in mind that enrolling beneficiaries and helping them save on their prescription drugs is the ultimate goal. Following are some simple and effective ideas some of you are implementing to help beneficiaries enroll:

- When assisting in the enrollment process, **provide them with an envelope and stamp and even help them address the envelope to the drug card sponsor.** This is an inexpensive way of making sure they are completing the last stage of the enrollment process – mailing in their application!
- When hosting enrollment sessions and using computers to assist beneficiaries in enrolling, **put the computers in the back of the room.** Low-income beneficiaries can be intimidated by computer equipment and they may be discouraged from participating in your session if they think they have to work the computers. Be sure to have computer-savvy staff and volunteers present to operate the computers.
- When assisting beneficiaries in filling out their enrollment forms, **make a photocopy of their form so you have their contact information** and a mechanism for following up with them to make sure they have completed and mailed the form. Also, highlight any incomplete information on the form so they know if they are missing anything before they mail the form. **If you are able to complete the form with the beneficiary, mail it for them and give them a copy.**
- When beneficiaries provide you with incomplete enrollment forms, don't turn them away! **Take their incomplete forms and call them back.** You can complete the form with them over the phone and mail it for them to ensure it gets to the drug card sponsor.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE

It is important to remind beneficiaries that each time they use their discount card, they will pay a five percent or 10 percent co-insurance on the discounted cost of their prescription. The pharmacy will then deduct the amount they spend on their prescriptions from the discount card. Whether they pay a five percent or 10 percent co-insurance depends on their annual income when they applied for the \$600 credit and the type of Medicare-approved drug discount card they have. You can get more information about Transitional Assistance by visiting www.medicare.gov or calling 1-800-MEDICARE.

In the news

The Medicare Modernization Act turned one on Dec. 8, and already this landmark law is helping millions of seniors and people with disabilities get significant savings on prescription drugs, while millions of others are getting more out of their Medicare. Click on the link below to read more!

<http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2004pres/20041208.html>